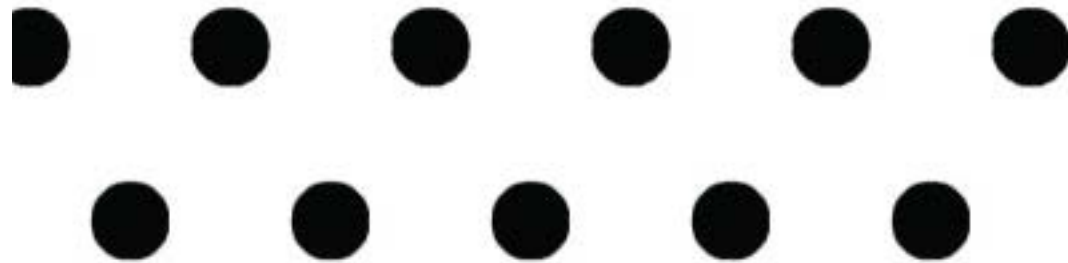


the things we cannot face



Part I. Doomed to Fail: Introductory Analysis of Collective Self Abandonment

This is the first of an undefined part series on the trauma that binds us, and the healing that will liberate us. It is a love letter to vulnerable conversations and the process of holding the misunderstood and disingenuous projection of the self accountable for the spectacularization of radical movements. Each idea in this introductory piece will be elaborated on, and given the space and analysis it is worthy of. However, we must first establish why these conversations matter, and the general harm their erasure has perpetuated.

The trauma we've experienced lives in our most intimate and genuine space, but our organizing doesn't reflect this, and it fails because of this. It is significantly easier to organize direct action than it is to organize self awareness and healing, so we use external organizing as a bandaid for what we truly need. We pretend that dismantling the structures that condition our behaviors will resolve the trauma they've already inflicted upon us; thriving on the bypass of our own deconstruction. We repress the feelings we have when our parents abuse us, when our friends and partners manipulate or assault us, when strangers disempower us; we put the effects of these experiences in the "personal life" compartment. We repress our trauma from our organizing, instead of taking the foundational steps of organizing to resolve it. We have been broken by these structures and experiences, and we continue to break one another and fail in our efforts to organize a better world, because there are no internal roots being pulled, only continuous pruning of leaves. This is a call for organizing the self, organizing healing; not solely for the sake of an effective collective movement of liberation, but for sake of maintaining hope that it's possible and we are worthy of its rewards.

Traumatic childhoods leading to traumatic relationships leading to wholly disconnected behaviors in our everyday lives; this is not a narrative that we find unrelatable. Yet still, we view theoretical and exploratory discussions around trauma and the self as a strange niche, relegated to the feminized world of radical discussions.

These are the things that fundamentally define and shape who we are; things that our "movement" violently excavates from our organizing, only opportunistically and superficially pausing when the movement demands it in order for us to maintain a pure "radical" identity; the one that stands in for our own disconnection. We set up accountability committees when we "inevitably" harm one another, and view it as an obligatory process where the right words light the path to an empty objective. Our analysis around abuse/accountability bloomed in dead earth and its fruition takes the form of a hot topic; it allows regurgitated buzzwords to operate as social currency and unspoken confusion and incompetency to convolute any attempts to extract clarity. This is a refusal to reflect on our own trauma as a focal point for theory, and it mirrors our lack of investment in the words we say, and the organizing we do. It's a denial of the self, not for the sake of the "community", as its oftentimes romantically framed, but for the protection of our own static existence. The self, and the self's trauma, is the foundation for the actions, individually and collectively, that obfuscate any positive path forward, and this requires an honest examination of what that means. It does not mean that we are devoid of agency, pre-disposed to harm others, and others us; it is not an excuse for harm, nor an analysis on how every survivor and perpetrator encompasses both; it is an exploration of why we fear the self and as a consequence, build nightmares.

These nightmares permeate our lives, yet there is an unfortunate tendency to discuss trauma solely as it relates to interpersonal abuse. When we recount the myriad of projects that have failed under the banner of "trauma begets trauma", we cite instances of sexual assault and perpetrators who drove apart the community, and then sit back and savor the bitter analysis of how we are traumatized people traumatizing others, as if that statement is a period followed by the back cover of a book. We use this underdeveloped, misinformed, and woefully narrow idea to then drunkenly stagger our way through its inevitable praxis of failed accountability processes.

We sit comfortably with the knowledge that this looming, abstract, and seemingly undefeatable, concept [trauma] creates impossible solutions in accountability efforts, but neglect to expand that pessimism to our organizing, as a whole. We fail to account for the projects failing due to burnout, authoritarian behaviors, martyr complexes, unclear objectives, and a host of other maladaptive tendencies. When we position trauma solely in a context of abuse, and not as a lens through which we process ourselves and the world, we have forfeited clarity and embraced failure.

At its core, trauma is an emotional reaction to events that cause us disempowerment; the feeling that we are no longer in control or afforded agency. We then become traumatized, leading to an internal, self generated feeling of disempowerment, frequently accompanied by the compatible, and equally volatile, feeling of shame. This will manifest in many ways, certainly not excluding, but more importantly, not at all limited to, or inherently bound to, the abuse of others. With this being said, it's mandatory to acknowledge that trauma exists on a spectrum, many of us are traumatized from horrific experiences of abuse, and those experiences will carry their own range of consequences specific to the self. However, if we are to view trauma as a cornerstone of our collective failure to cultivate liberation, we must expand this scope. The traumatic structures that we exist under have not endured as long as they have, by chance. There is no chance in sustained oppression, only strategy, and that strategy is to disempower in such a way that the only purpose the self sees for existence is survival; this strategy shames the self for wanting more, or for failing to understand that a life comprised solely of surviving for death is a life worth living. This is our collective trauma, but it is not a consistent or generalizable one; it is merely our skeleton awaiting the muscles and tendons of our own individualized trauma – informed by the foundation they lie on. These individualized events will compound onto themselves, and their complexity will form a skin resistant to even our own understanding of what has occurred. The structural influences we fight to dismantle are nested, and guarded, within these individual traumas. How then are we able to liberate ourselves from the foundation

We must acknowledge the failures of the psychological industrial complex, while strategically drawing from the pool of their gate kept knowledge and liberating it for ourselves, and each other. We must touch on every miniscule way our trauma impacts our collective goals, and we must treat the self as an all encompassing form of political analysis. This will be our materialization as individuals, and as a movement.

There is never a final analysis, and this series will never be complete.

